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### Portmanteau

Peggy Ann Edwards  
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Portmanteau

Peggy Ann Edwards

Thesis submitted to the  
College of Creative Arts  
at West Virginia University  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of

Master of Arts  
in  
Painting

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Morgantown, West Virginia  
2003

Keywords: nature, hybrids

UMI Number: 1422132



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## **ABSTRACT**

Portmanteau

Peggy Ann Edwards

Portmanteau is a blend of two words incorporated to make a new meaning. In my painting I combine two animals to make a new life form. The weak, defenseless animals get armament and the fierce, dominant carnivores are made less threatening so that man will not find it necessary to destroy them. My animals are hybrids and with hybridity anything is possible because hybridity is about making meaning without being bound by actuality. My hybrid animals are whimsical and funny but I create them for a serious reason. I want people to look at them and see that they are precious, and from there, to realize that all animals, all creation, is precious. Man was not intended to rule this world and destroy habitats and species to build condominiums and parking lots. Each living thing has value and significance.

TO TWO PAULS

To my beloved husband who gave  
me the opportunity to be  
what I wanted to be  
and to my teacher  
who had patience while I grew.

## CONTENTS

1. Hybrid Animals—why I paint them . . . . . page 1
2. Painters who influenced me . . . . . pages 1-2
3. Conclusion . . . . . page 3
4. Works Cited . . . . . page 4
5. Images . . . . . pages 5-12

Henri Rousseau once said “Nothing makes me happier than to contemplate nature and to paint it.” I would paraphrase his sentiment and say that nothing makes me happier than to contemplate nature and to change it.

My animals are hybrids, whimsical and funny, but I create them for a serious reason. I want people to look at them and realize they are precious and, from there, to realize that all animals, all of creation, is precious. Man was not given dominion over nature although we act as if we had been. Consequently we are busy destroying habitats and species to build parking lots and condominiums. To protect my animals I have changed them. I give the defenseless armaments so that they can keep from being consumed. I make the fierce less so in the hope that man will not see them as threatening. My animals are hybrids and with hybridity anything is possible because hybridity is about making meaning without being bound by actuality. My imagining of such animals contributes to a long surrealist tradition. My animals are a metaphor for reality. I see animals as equals or better than men because of their essential innocence.

Some of the artists I admire have similar feelings and view nature in a spiritual manner. Franz Marc, a German artist born in 1888, one of the founders of a branch of abstraction that was spiritually inclined, originally studied theology and wanted to be a priest. He eventually switched to art but kept his spiritual roots. He was concerned about the relationships between animals and human beings. He, too, felt that animals were more natural and pure than people and that through animals he could express his own spiritual feelings. He looked to nature for inspiration and his major animal theme was the horse. He followed horses for months, trying to eliminate detail and create the essential creature. The results were...”Brilliantly and symbolically colored animals which were intended to evoke a new vision of spirituality.” Marc and Wassily Kandinsky founded the Blue Rider group, believing in a new world community and a changed humanity. Eventually Marc began to see animals less heroically and more symbolically.

Earlier, across the Atlantic, a similarly religious and spiritual man painted his own beasts and human beings, the object being to promote universal peace. Edward Hicks, a Quaker minister born in 1780, was inspired by the verse from Isaiah—“The wolf shall also dwell with the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the kid, and the calf and the young lion and the fatling together, and a little child shall lead them...” Hicks is one of America’s most important “primitive” painters. More than 50 of his works were inspired by Isaiah’s “Peaceable Kingdom.” Hicks was not a master of linear perspective and so his paintings have strange and interesting quirks. His animals with their great staring eyes and distorted bodies have a great deal of charm.

Perhaps my favorite of the primitive painters and the one that I think inspired me the most is Henri Rousseau, a French painter born in 1844. He is, perhaps, the most celebrated of naive artists and although his paintings reveal that he was self-taught, he is a much finer painter than Hicks. I do not know of any religious influence on his work but some of the masters he tried to emulate could not achieve. He is best known for his jungle scenes which are thought to be forerunners of surrealism because of their dream-like sensibility. Although he claimed to have traveled widely, his animals were sketched at the zoo and his foliage from a public garden. His

paintings were carefully composed and magical but I do not see any tendency to glorify his animals. They are subjects like any other.

Much further back in antiquity (late 15<sup>th</sup> Century) is another painter who appreciated the bizarre and the strange. Hieronymus Bosch, a Dutch painter and a member of a conservative religious group, the Brotherhood of our Lady, painted religious paintings that were probably unlike anything painted before or since. As Kyla Ward noted in *Tabula Rasa 2*...the pressures exerted on artists to conform to some norm have always existed and still of course do, and in the same ways. Contemporary taste for the fantastic and original is also far from universal.” Painting in an age when imagination tended to be burned at the stake, Bosch avoided trouble by using the standard religious imagery of the time, although after his death the Inquisition engendered whispers of heresy with respect to his work. In Bosch’s paintings there exist a horned animals with the hindquarters of a horse, another with a horse in front and a goat behind, an animals with a serpent’s tail and a fish with an animal’s head. He used well-established religious symbolism as well. Numbers of his paintings have tiny, unobtrusive owls peeking out. They are symbols of witchcraft and demonology and they are reinforced by the fruit found situated around the figures’ genitalia. Bosch’s images are striking and memorable but not always pleasant. In fact, he dealt a lot with horror and eternal punishment. His paintings reflected the obsessive medieval preoccupations of religion.

Another contemporary painter inspired me because of his concentration on things that are gone, have died, or spiritual things. Ross Bleckner is a painter who blends abstraction and figuration very effectively. Bleckner revealed his bond with humanity in his AIDS paintings, memorializing lost friends and fellow artists. Reviewer Lisa Dennison notes that he has ... ‘been engaged in the tradition of the sublime...through his theme of light...he suggests humanity’s synchronicity with a more perfect cosmos...” Dennison also notes that Bleckner “has pursued a convincing expression of religious experience in a secular world, seeking the ways in which nature reveals its transcendent mysteries.



## CONCLUSION

I choose to paint hybrid animals because, like Edward Hicks' peaceable kingdoms, I long for humanity to become greater than itself—to realize all of nature is essential and beautiful. As our population grows and commingles, however unwillingly, more and more people are becoming hybrids. I would hope that mankind would appreciate these hybrids and value them for their differences and their similarities. Sometimes when people have multiple identities it leads to instability for them and their culture. It can also lead to fluidity. We remain hidebound and ethnocentric at our peril. I also believe that hybridity is essential to art. Kobena Mercer, who has spoken and written widely about hybridity, says hybridity (the encounter with the other) was essential to key moments in Western modernism, such as cubism, surrealism and pop art. He cites the use of the found object as an illustration. But today, he thinks, multiculturalism is taken for granted. Perhaps in his rarified circle it is. I think hybridity opens up new possibilities, like Picasso with his African masks, and enriches our lives and our art. There is much more to discover and make use of in the art of other cultures. And there is much to be done about multiculturalism so that we can begin to associate with and understand people from other cultures. When we understand, we will "make war no more."

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Untitled  
(pencil on paper)



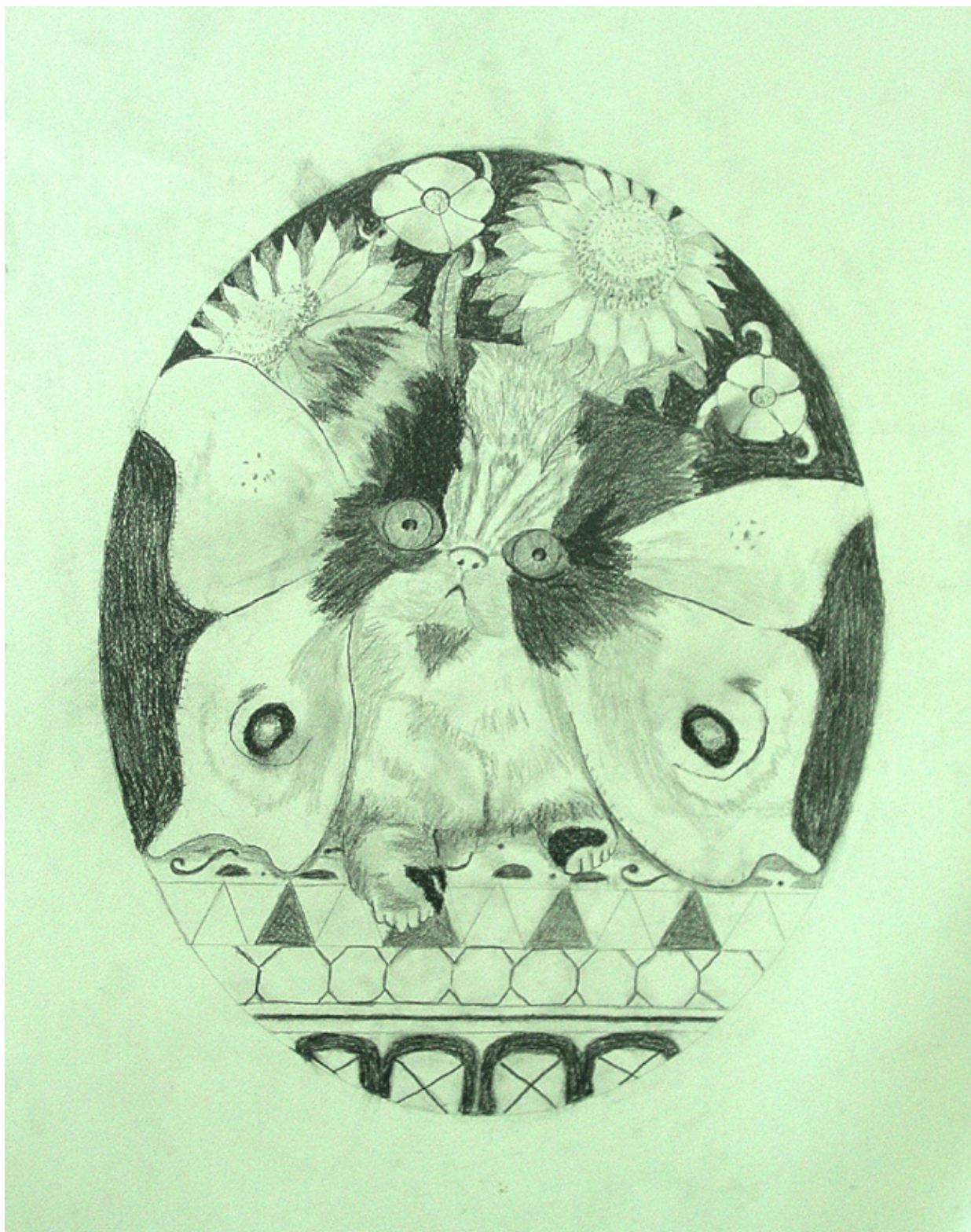


Puss 'n Wings II  
(oil on canvas)



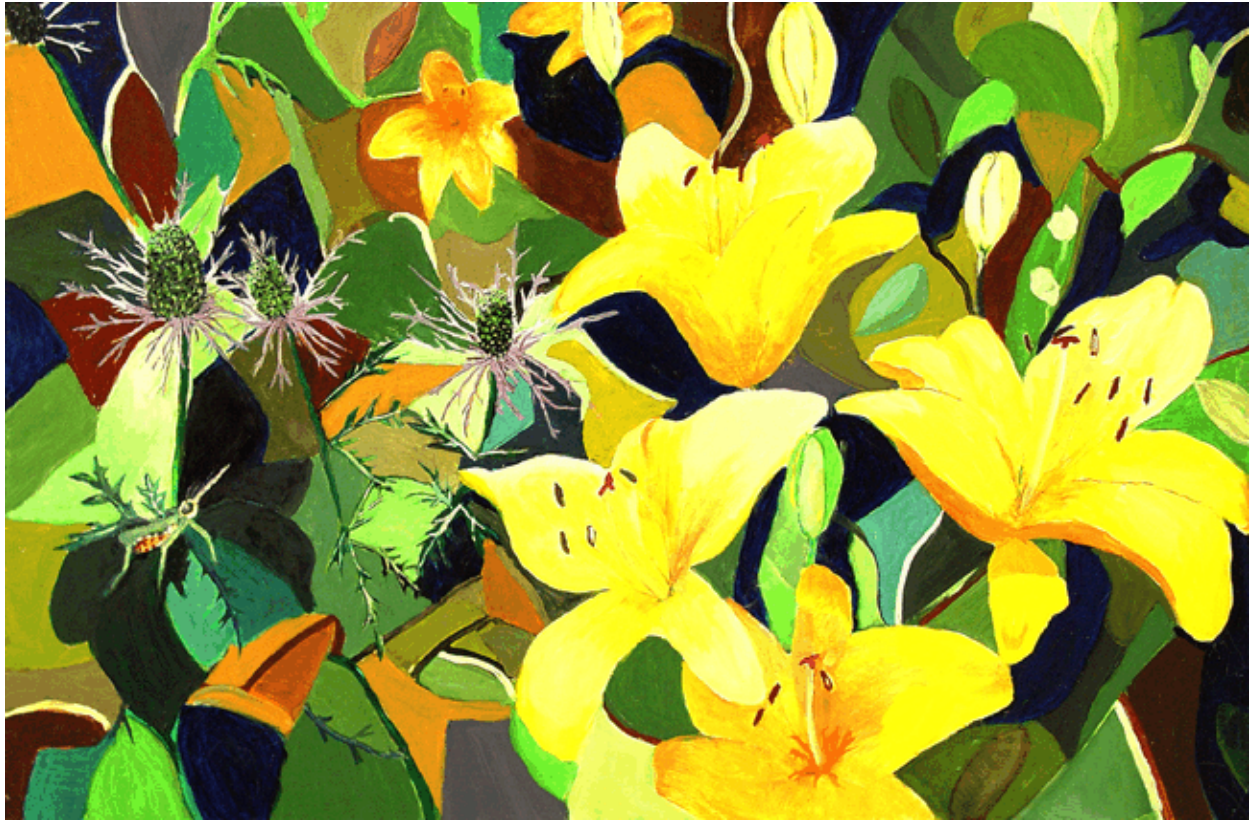
Don't Tread on Me  
(oil on canvas)





Puss 'n Wings I  
(pencil on paper)





Little Is as Little Does  
(oil on canvas)



Frocelot  
(oil on canvas)





After Sargent's Lily Lily Rose  
(oil on canvas)





March Hare  
(oil on canvas)